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Church and problems of contemporary bioethics : current challenges in the light of the bioethical document of the Conference of Poland's Episcopacy

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**CHURCH AND PROBLEMS OF CONTEMPORARY
BIOETHICS. CURRENT CHALLENGES IN THE LIGHT
OF THE BIOETHICAL DOCUMENT OF THE
CONFERENCE OF POLAND'S EPISCOPACY**

**KOŚCIÓŁ A PROBLEMY WSPÓŁCZESNEJ BIOETYKI.
AKTUALNE WYZWANIA W ŚWIETLE DOKUMENTU
BIOETYCZNEGO KONFERENCJI
EPISKOPATU POLSKI**

Artykuł omawia aktualne wyzwania bioetyczne w świetle dokumentu bioetycznego, który został opracowany przez Konferencję Episkopatu Polski. Według autora wyzwania, które stoją przed współczesnym człowiekiem, to przede wszystkim te zjawiska, które dotyczą poszanowania życia ludzkiego i jego godności. Dzieje się to szczególnie w sytuacji, kiedy jest to życie całkowicie bezbronne, a tym samym powierzone integralnej ochronie – w rodzinie: matce, ojcu, babci, dziadkowi itp., a w prawie: polityce, środowisku społecznemu, różnym decydującym legistycznym, interesom. Żadne inne wyzwania: ekonomiczne, polityczne, militarne, ideowe itp., nie mają takiego znaczenia, jak te o charakterze bioetycznym. Autor stwierdza, że to od poszanowania pryncypium moralnego, jakim jest godność ludzka (będącą także pryncypium demokratycznym i demokratyzującym), zależy jakość życia człowieka w sensie globalnym, przestrzennym, treściowym, moralnym itp., po prostu społecznościowo-relacyjnym. Innymi słowy, wyzwania (o których tutaj jest mowa) to walka o podmiotowe traktowanie każdego życia ludzkiego w tym jedynym i unikalnym środowisku, w którym możliwy jest jego habitat (jego egzystencja). Autor

zauważa, że to bardzo dobrze, z punktu widzenia bioetyki, iż ukazał się taki dokument, który jest jednolitym głosem polskiego Kościoła katolickiego. Napisany został on językiem zrozumiałym, doktrynalnym, normatywnym, nie tracąc przy tym nic z ducha pastoralnego, tzn. chcącego podjąć dialog ze współczesnym światem wiary i niewiary. Chodzi o dialog zobowiązującej w sumieniu prawdy o człowieku i jego początkach (którą głosi Kościół) z popieraną przez rządy Europy ideologią liberalizmu i laickości, a w istocie o postawę zaangażowania się w obronę niewinnego i świętego życia ludzkiego.

Słowa kluczowe: *godność ludzka, dokument bioetyczny, Episkopat Polski, wyzwania bioetyczne, prawo do życia.*

Introduction

The topic: *Church and problems of contemporary bioethics* should be (and is even worth being) presented in the light of the recently published bioethical document of the Conference of Poland's Episcopacy, which came into existence in connection with the situation of civilisational (biotechnological) threats of human life in Poland, thus embracing also threats in relation to the natural environment (ecology). Simply, the Polish bishops decided to develop (on the basis of the work of the Team delegated for this purpose) a document devoted to the contemporary bioethical challenges, which was supposed to provide assistance in unifying and sounding of the doctrinal voice of the Catholic Church in difficult and live issues regarding the protection of life (human life).

Thus, during a meeting on 5 March 2013 a document was adopted, which was entitled "On bioethical challenges faced by contemporary man". Next, Katolicka Agencja Informacyjna [*the Catholic News Agency*] organised a presentation of this "new bioethical document". The meeting was held on Tuesday, 9 April 2013, 11.00 hrs at the seat of the Secretariat of the Conference of Poland's Episcopacy in Warsaw. The presentation was attended by: Archbishop Henryk Hoser – Chairman of the Team of the Conference of Poland's Episcopacy for Bioethical Issues, Bishop Wojciech Polak – Secretary General of the Conference of Poland's Episcopacy and Dr Piotr Klimas – a gynaecologist. The conference was hosted by Marcin Przeworski – the editor-in-chief of KAI [*the Catholic News Agency*]¹.

As it could have been expected the leftist, agnostic, atheistic, materialistic, liberal etc. circles did not recognise the bioethical (religious) argumentation

¹ *We wtorek prezentacja dokumentu bioetycznego KEP, <http://www.ekai.pl/wydarzenia> (8.04.2013).*

included in this document whereas the rightist, traditionalistic, church-related circles did so (some even with a huge applause). It additionally prompts us to want to get to know (and understand) better the problems of the contemporary bioethics and the standing of the Catholic Church on a general basis and in the case such as intervention of *in vitro* techniques in the natural environment of passing human life (that is giving rise to this life in the context of parental and sacramental love). It involves respecting the mental, somatic, spiritual, moral, etc. structure of man and woman but also the right to life, that is a man's possession of the civil entitlement to bodily inviolability from the very beginning (that is from the point of conception).

1. Basic points of the content presented in the document

The document was divided into five points (parts), which feature essential purport for regulating (explaining and underlying) the undertaken bioethical issues (with special provision for *in vitro* techniques) and its motto is the words from the Book of Genesis: "And at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man"². Thus, the first point entitled: "A man of good will against the civilisation of death and for the culture of life" features the issue of moral responsibility in terms of formation of Christian conscience. According to its primary principles the most important "task of a Christian is shaping their conscience in compliance with the teaching of the Church"³. It is understood (first and foremost) as gaining appropriate and reliable knowledge on the origins of human life. "A burning" motive of this issue stated in such a way is new challenges in the field of bioethics, especially in terms of *in vitro* fertilisation and eugenics, to which Christian conscience cannot be indifferent, that is badly formed⁴.

The second point discusses: "the essence of threats for human life in prenatal phase". The bishops referred here to the current cultural situation where the exercised moral (worldview-related) relativism negates the basic (traditionally recognised) notions, such as dignity, life, health, humanity, justice, etc. According to the bishops, as a result of wrongly understood culture there is a demand for access to contraceptives, abortive medications, abortion, but also to the

² *Genesis* 9, 5.

³ Konferencja Episkopatu Polski, *O wyzwaniach bioetycznych, przed którymi stoi współczesny człowiek* (5.03.2013 r.).

⁴ Cf. *Rodzina droga Kościoła*, red. M. Ozorowski, W. Nowacki, Łomża 2005, s. 121-145.

manner of conception and giving birth to a child. The tendency to relativise the value of life is getting stronger and stronger. In the name of what a person with intellectual or physical disability evokes negative emotions, which manifest themselves in the belief that it would be better for them if they had not been born. On the other hand, for childless couples the procedure of conception outside the mother's body called *in vitro* is allowed. Nobody minds it that in case of such treatments many abortions are performed and unfavourable genetic changes occur in the genome of the embryo brought (in this manner) to life. Although the possibility of the occurrence of genetic defects is treated by means of pre-implantation diagnostics, it is unfortunately often done at the cost of the consent for selection of "produced" conceptuses. In this situation the suspicion of the occurrence of negative genetic changes itself may constitute the ground for the decision on destroying the child's life (it being killed)⁵.

In the third point entitled "Truth on human sexuality and responsibility for the child" we have the main ethical principles touching the need to get involved in the defence of human life on the part of a believer. One of these principles says that "a man's sexuality determines human identity and shapes all their life". It does not only refer to the ability to have an intercourse (enabling procreation) but also to the character of a relation between a woman and a man in which it is sexuality which builds their mutual unity, feeling of closeness and security"⁶. As a consequence the document reminds the faithful of a very important moral truth that: "good can never be achieved by means of wicked methods and that there are moral principles whose binding character can never be suspended". What it means is that "human life is a primary value and unassignable good. It demands absolute protection regardless of the stage and quality of life of a man".

In the fourth point entitled "Our attitude" the Conference of Poland's Episcopacy appeals to all the people of good will for objection to the practices attempting on human life. It should first manifest itself in taking unequivocal proclamation in favour of life. It means a prohibition of idleness that is failure to take a clear position. It is necessary to get engaged in the active defence of human life from as early as the point of its conception (appearance on this

⁵ KEP, *O wyzwaniach bioetycznych, przed którymi stoi współczesny człowiek*, dz. cyt.: "The feeling that it is possible to freely manipulate one's body as if it did not take part in one's dignity and decide on the consequences of one's sexuality in a manner different from cooperating with the natural order of a woman's cycle and accounting for temporary continence".

⁶ *Ibidem*.

world). In turn, in a wider social (political) dimension it also means that what should be catered for is non-discrimination of families, appropriate pro-family policy, provision of special care for multi-child and dysfunctional families etc⁷.

The last point deals with the manner of political engagement of the faithful and is a (certain) extension of the previous one. The title itself, which is: "Involvement of Catholics in the public life" suggests that it refers to shaping political attitudes defending human life in all its aspects and stages of existence. Hence, the Church reminds that: "it is a duty of every Catholic participating in the public life to remain faithful to the teaching of the Catholic Church and Christ himself. There can be no compromise whatsoever (with this world and its laws) in the questions of faith and morality"⁸. It is in the name of man's good (mutual good), which is faith and salvation that politicians should have an absolute feeling of responsibility for human life as they regulate the scope of bioethical procedures, that is the permissible and illegitimate ones and behind this there are primary values which must be respected by all citizens (whether believing in God or not). Otherwise, peaceful shaping of social relations will become impossible.

In terms of detailed patterns the bishops remind of the teaching of *Evangelium vitae* encyclical. According to it a member of parliament (a politician, legislator etc.) would act rightly when giving their support to proposals aiming at the limitation of harmfulness of some act of law even though it would be in some aspects unfair. In this way they would head for decreasing the negative consequences of the existing evil. As unlike in case of a moral compromise it is possible to take part in a political compromise provided that it is to achieve greater good. However, all this should absolutely not be a method of determining the criteria of moral good⁹.

2. Necessity of a bioethical (doctrinal) document

The voice of the Episcopacy (that is the voice of the bishops, spiritual shepherds) on the issues of faith and morality is of significant importance for the faithful (at least it can be assumed so). Thus, taking a position by a group of people strongly related to the (highest) moral and religious authority must have been expected by many Polish Catholics if not in the direct sense (specified formally) then certainly intuitively. Moreover, it implies teaching (expressed in

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ *Ibidem*; cf. John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, no 73.

a clear, easily understood language) but also evidence that Polish bishops speak “one voice” in matters of bioethical responsibility. And as it seems – even after cursory reading – the significance of this documents meets the criteria specified above. Furthermore, such a document was announced (by the Permanent Council of the Conference of Poland’s Episcopacy) as the one which is “to be among others an expression of search for solutions regarding the manner of transposition of the bioethical theme into everyday pastoral work”.

The Chairman of Poland’s Episcopacy Archbishop Józef Michalik specified the following issues, which were to come up: “Among others the subject of the defence of the institution of marriage and family will be mentioned. We share the opinion of the French bishops and express solidarity with all those who take up these subjects”¹⁰. In this way he referred to the recent manifestation in the defence of (Christian) marriage, which was held in Paris, but there were also other similar (huge) protests. The march of 13 January 2013 against “marriages for all” was attended by nearly 800 thousand whereas the one of 5 March 2013 “against the state recognising the relation of people of the same sex as marriage” attracted as many as 1.5 million people. It was a way of demanding a referendum on this issue¹¹. Similar (large) manifestations were held in Madrid.

Eventually, the expectations regarding the urgent necessity to publish such a (bioethical) document, may in particular be associated with the intention of drawing the attention of the decision makers (legislators) to these problems which are essential (that is basic) for functioning of the society in the spirit of respecting the entire (and universal) truth on the man, that is – in the Christian virtue of justice and love. And it also means that the Polish state should make (civil) law respecting the natural rights of man, who by the total population of believers is interpreted as a personal being, that is one having inviolable, unassignable dignity (natural and supernatural). And if such a stance of the bishops was (or should have been) looked forward to by the faithful in Poland, it first and foremost refers to those who as social activists, politicians, members of parliament etc. would like to act (whether individually or collectively) in agreement with the teaching of the Catholic Church, to which they belong and which they want to serve (through their engagement: political, social, scientific, etc.).

¹⁰ *Obradowała Rada Stala KEP*, http://www.episkopat.pl/struktura_kep/prezydium_kep/4847 (15.01.2013).

¹¹ *Wielka manifestacja Francuzów przeciw tzw. „związkom partnerskim”*, <http://www.radiomaryja.pl/informacje> (25.03.2013).

And it also means the consent of the state for citizens' actions following the Christian conscience (environmentally, ecologically sensitised as ecologists, bioethicians, theologians would say)¹².

3. Perception and the expected consequences of the document

Will the Polish society (along with all its legal layer) accept the impact of such a (that is so formulated) document of the Conference of Poland's Episcopacy? It is a question to which a believer would like to hear a positive answer and as soon as possible but as it can be expected one will have to wait for the consequences of this document for some time, for example until subsequent votings in the Parliament concerning issues such as *in vitro*, abortion, euthanasia etc. The reason for such reasoning is the negative voices in the mass media, which lack understanding, for example: "the bishops lie", "the Church did harm itself", "disappointment again", "the first Pole born thanks to *in vitro* intends to commit apostasy: It's a reaction to the bioethical document of the Conference of Poland's Episcopacy",¹³ etc. Luckily, on the other side one can see completely different judgements expressing appreciation of such an undertaken and pursued initiative. They share a strong conviction that: "the document is extremely needed for the contemporary people lost in the chaos of relativism"¹⁴ as Katarzyna Małecka-Przybyło from Pro foundation stated.

The negative attitude was revealed by associations of neoliberal, materialistic nature: Association for Fertility Treatment and Adoption Support "Nasz Bocian" [*Our Stork*] and Federation for Women and Family Planning. They claim that by publishing such a document the Episcopacy exerts pressure on the members of Parliament. It especially applies to the statement that: "Catho-

¹² Cf. M. Czachorowski, *Skrypt wybranych zagadnień bioetyki i etyki seksualnej*, Lublin 2013.

¹³ *Pierwsza Polka urodzona dzięki *in vitro* zamierza dokonać apostazji. To reakcja na dokument bioetyczny KEP*, <http://www.fronda.pl/a/pierwsza-polka> (1.04.2013).

¹⁴ Abp H. Hoser: *Dokument bioetyczny KEP wzywa do podmiotowego traktowania życia ludzkiego*, <http://www.oaza.pl/> (10.04.2013); *ibidem*: "K. Małecka-Przybyło from Pro foundation stated that the document is extremely needed for the contemporary people «lost in the chaos of relativism». She pointed out the support essential from the point of view of a woman and mother, which was included in the document for the protection of the dignity of human life. She stressed that the arguments for abortion are unfair and contradict the human nature; they stem from communist, political, business and pharmacologic propaganda. The document reminds again that life is sacred".

lic MPs should in their work first and foremost be driven by the outlook of and faithfulness to Catholic preaching”. The declaration of this Federation also reads: “The provisions of the document may be understood as an appeal to deputies of Catholic faith for voting on drafts of bills on reproductive rights and health (abortion, *in vitro*, contraception) in compliance with the teaching of the Church hierarchy and at the same time ignoring the real needs of the whole population of citizens of our country. «Taking such a position contradicts the principle of the laity of the state»”¹⁵.

On the other hand, a positive symptom after the publication of this document (ignoring the fact that the only negative reaction of the circles which traditionally do not favour Catholic Church - both in Poland and abroad – may be recognised as a lack of success), which should be emphasised is the fact (which fortunately occurred in plenty of discussions) that “faith and moral beliefs cannot be imposed on anyone”¹⁶. It is because faith and morality resulting from it are a question of the internal freedom of man and it means that the Conference of Bishops does not force anyone to obedience since as the things are it cannot compel anyone while by preaching the faith truth (to which it has the right arising from the same constitution which the opponents of Catholic argumentation like referring to) it (only) appeals to the freedom of conscience of believers but also non-believers not excluding from this group politicians, members of parliament, social activists, self-government officials etc. It is there (that is in conscience) that the meeting of the truth (of faith) and will, wanting or not wanting to support or not support what has become the subject of cognizance on moral good is held. “Freedom of conscience is never freedom of truth but always and only in the truth”¹⁷ – states solemnly the encyclical by the Polish Pope John Paul II - *Veritatis Splendor*.

It is a clear track to point out the total lack of the grounds with reference to the rationality (or validity) of accusations made by the opponents and critics of the stance presented by the Conference of Poland’s Episcopacy. In a social (worldview) discourse the Church should always follow the path determined in this manner. It denotes a similarity to Jesus Christ who summoned to faith and indicated the negative results of its refusal (spoke of the punishment of eternal

¹⁵ „Nasz Bocian”: dokument Episkopatu vs. *in vitro* zawiera kłamstwa, [http://www.wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,1 \(9.04.2013\)](http://www.wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,1 (9.04.2013)).

¹⁶ K. Król, *Wiary nie można narzucić*, “Gość Zielonogórski-Gorzowski” 2012, no 42, [http://www.gosc.pl/doc \(18.10.2012\)](http://www.gosc.pl/doc (18.10.2012)).

¹⁷ Cf. John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, no 64.

hell) but (by the very fact) compelled nobody to it. Therefore, the Church doctrine (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church no 160) has it written down that nobody can be forced to profess faith (eg. one or another denomination) as it would be a violation of the freedom of human conscience¹⁸.

Hence, the prohibition to coerce to faith is a position which in a special way refers to the people in power and not the preaching ones and those reprimanding in the name of faith and morality. It means that it refers to those who have external coercion at their disposal and may want to take advantage of it for their particular interests.

4. Weak elements of the document

Talking about certain weaker elements of the discussed document is not (in any dimension whatsoever) an attempt to criticise the teaching of the Catholic Church in terms of bioethics. But one would like not to wait until the subsequent discussion in the Parliament and later as a consequence participate in similar discussions (which have been held) on various social networking sites when they cannot (or are no longer capable) find the appropriate methodological dimension. What matters is that the Church in Poland (but also in general terms the universal church) should be able to anticipate burning issues, especially bioethical ones regarding civilisational interference in the right to life and present its stance to the general public well in advance. Even when it is not completely unanimous (completely developed etc.), that is - before another worldview conflict arises from which only scandal and religious indifference can benefit¹⁹.

What we mean by that is that the discussed document of the Conference of Poland's Episcopacy lacks the appropriately stressed theme (in certain sense publicly announced in connection with huge demonstrations in Madrid and

¹⁸ Cf. The Second Vatican Council, *Dignitatis humanae declaration*, no 11; *ibidem*: "Jesus called for faith and conversion but He did not exert coercion upon anyone. He bore witness to the truth, but He refused to impose the truth by force on those who spoke against it. His kingdom... extends its dominion by the love whereby Christ, lifted up on the cross, draws all men to Himself"; *Code of Canon Law*, can. 748, § 2: "God calls on men to serve Him in the Spirit and truth; such a call binds them in conscience but does not compel them... It exemplified itself to the highest degree in Jesus Christ"; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no 160: No one is ever permitted to coerce persons to embrace faith against their conscience.

¹⁹ Por. *Słowo wstępne Abpa Henryka Hosera*, w: *Etyka w medycynie. Ujęcie interdyscyplinarne*, red. M. A. Monge, Warszawa 2012, s. 21.

Paris) of free unions, gender ideology, homosexual propaganda (which especially accounts for the problem of school), the right to upbringing and parental objections, etc. It is so because the Church constantly has to remind the contemporary world (aiming at laity at any price) that telling the truth is never (and can never be) the speech of hatred. It is on the contrary; the evidence of truth is always related to the courage of love and prudence of engagement. Also the document lacks the (so important, for example for building synergy in family relations) transplantological theme; the issue of *ex mortuo* transplants.

It refers to (unclear) binding solutions in terms of presumption of consent for using organs and the lack of the relevant defence of the rights of persons in a (so called irreversible) coma. The Church should loudly and constantly articulate in public space the norms of the Catechism according to which there is an obligation to receive a direct consent for using organs from the donor. What is also very important here is the standing of Pope Benedict XVI on the necessity of applying in doubtful situations the principle of caution referring to *Evangelium vitae* 60, which states that: “Any doubts concerning the existence of human should be removed for the benefit of life and actions threatening man should be firmly objected”²⁰. The article by Lucetta Scarafii from *L'Osservatore Romano* (3 August 2008) written on the 40th anniversary of Harvard definition of brain death, presenting procedural, ethical and moral doubts in its understanding and use is a proof that this topic is to return. It may be necessary then to prepare another, new bioethical document of the Conference of Poland's Episcopacy.

As far as *in vitro* is concerned there should appear (as it seems) the preaching of the Church defending the rights regarding the identity of a child conceived through biotechnological manipulations. It is a crucial problem, which has not yet found a good civil and legal solution in Poland whereas in Germany and the USA the right to know one's genetic origin is successively granted to citizens whose origin of existence is due to their parents' consent for the use of *in vitro* procedures.

Another question is addressing of this document (in other words – its direction). It is of a pastoral dimension but as it seems the Conference of Episcopacy did not want to be a preacher directly for the Parliament. The bishops preferred to point the needle of their bioethical message in terms of *in vitro* at anyone

²⁰ Cf. Konferencja Episkopatu Polski, Dokument: *O wyzwaniach bioetycznych, przed którymi stoi współczesny człowiek, ibidem*: “John Paul II formulates this norm unequivocally: «the mere probability that a human person is involved would suffice to justify an absolutely clear prohibition of any intervention aimed at killing a human embryo» (Evangelium vitae, no 60)”.

(interested) in such a theme. It has its advantages but this kind of approach may also soothe the power of a moral obligation of those decision makers who (by profession) have to consider the fate of the weakest and poorest beings in the society. It is well known that in these issues they absolutely must make no mistakes (or be indifferent)²¹.

It is a symptomatic fact (both legally and morally) that as early as in October 2011 the European Tribunal of Justice delivered a statement that human conceptuses carry the dignity of a human person. This statement may constitute an excellent starting point for the dialogue with the deputies, also with those who do not admit to having a Christian worldview option. What it means is that they are closer to recognising higher dignity in a healthy animal rather than in a sick child.

Conclusion

Contemporary challenges faced by contemporary man are first and foremost phenomena concerning the respect of human life and its particular dignities. It happens especially in a situation when life is completely defenceless and as a result entrusted to the integral protection within the family: mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, etc. and in terms of law: politics, social environment, various legislative decision makers, interests. No other challenges: economic, political, military, ideological etc., have the same importance as the ones of bioethical character.

It is respecting a moral principle, which is human dignity (also a democratic and democratising principle) on which depends the quality of human life in a global, spatial, substantial, moral etc. sense, simply in a sense dealing with community and relations. The challenges (being discussed here) are a combat for subjective treatment of every human life in this only and unique environment in which its habitat (its existence) is possible. Life which the Church

²¹ *Uroczystości odpustowe ku czci św. Wojciecha w Gnieźnie*, in: *Gazetawyborcza.pl*, http://www.wyborcza.pl/1,91446,13821604,Uroczystosci_odpustowe_ku_czci; *ibidem*: „Archbishop Skworc also referred to the work conducted by the Polish MPs. In this concrete case what I mean is the lack of activity in the question of legal protection of embryos, that is human conceptuses. Meanwhile in October 2011 the European Tribunal of Justice delivered a statement that human conceptuses carry the dignity of a human person. Therefore, it is forbidden to experiment and trade with them. That is why the lack of regulations, a legal gap is an open door to abuse. It is a serious sin of negligence”.

has always presented as untouchable because of it being sacred and the state (current – democratic one) attempts to relativise in the name of its (lay) values.

From the point of view of bioethics it is very good that such a document was published as it is the consolidated voice of the Polish Catholic Church. That it was written in a comprehensible, doctrinal, normative language not losing anything of its pastoral spirit, that is wanting to establish a dialogue with the contemporary world of faith and disbelief. It is a dialogue of the truth obliging in conscience (on man and his origins) with the ideology of liberalism and laity supported by the European governments. In actual fact, it refers to the attitude of engagement in the defence of innocent and sacred life against hideous and godless attempting on it justified by civilisational (progress-related) needs or democratic ones (that is with the application of the principle of majority or popularity).

Eventually, despite the fact that every such document is bound to have some imperfections we are looking forward (as announced by the Episcopacy) to the subsequent works of this type (in particular the interested parties here are: bioethicians, moralists, theologians). To put it simply, they are awaited by the world of science but also by ordinary people. In total, those who think of salvation in Jesus Christ but also those who are driven by a simple will to act in the name of the acquired moral good (that is good understood objectively and normatively). There are much more bioethical problems than those described in the bioethical document of the Conference of Poland's Episcopacy of March 2013 and they must also be subjected to pastoral interpretation adequate to the passing time and inevitably oncoming progress.

**Fr Stanislaw Bialy: The Church and problems of contemporary bioethics.
Current challenges in the light of the bioethical document
of the Episcopal Conference of Poland**

The article discusses the current challenges in the light of the bioethical document, which was developed by the Episcopal Conference of Poland. According to the author, the challenges facing the modern man today concern, first of all, the phenomena related with respect for human life and its dignity. This happens especially in a situation where this life is completely defenceless, and thus entrusted to the integral protection of the family: mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, etc., and, as far as the law is concerned, to decision-makers in politics, social environment, legislation and business. No other challenges: economic, political, military, ideological, etc., are as important as those of bioethics. The author states that it is the principle of respect for the moral

and human dignity (which is also a democratic and democratizing principle) that the quality of human life in a global, spatial, factual, moral, etc. sense, the quality of all its social relations, depends on. In other words, the challenges (which are here referred to) consist in a struggle for treating every human life subjectively in the only and unique environment in which its habitat (its existence) is possible. The author notes that it is very good, from the point of view of bioethics, that such a document, which is the united voice of the Polish Catholic Church, was published. It is written in the understandable, doctrinal and normative language, without losing the pastoral spirit, i.e. the spirit of a dialogue with the modern world of faith and unbelief. It is the dialogue between the conscience-obliging truth about the man and his beginnings (which the Church proclaims), and the ideology of liberalism and secularism supported by the governments of Europe. It means, in fact, the attitude of commitment to the defence of innocent and sacred human life.

Keywords: human dignity, bioethical document, the Polish Episcopate, bioethical challenges, the right to life.

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